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SUBJECT: PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE AHADI PONDERES TERMS FOR AN
INTERIM GOVERNMENT

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. Christopher Dell, Reasons 1.5 (b)
and (d)

¶1. (C) Presidential candidate and former Finance Minister Anwarulhaq Ahadi on March 3 told the Charge he could reluctantly accept the President as head of an interim government if certain changes served to check Karzai's "abuses" of the power of incumbency. Ahadi suggested replacements for two key Karzai re-election figures as essential conditions for a level playing field. Jelani Popal, head of the Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG), who manages the governors for Karzai and also donor-funded community aid programs, must go. Abdullah, deputy head of the intelligence service NDS, likewise is squeezing local leaders to support Karzai and must be removed, according to Ahadi. Ahadi was willing to consider measures proposed by other politicians, such as a longer campaign period or a freeze on appointments, but remained clear that Karzai's opponents face a steep challenge to match the President in grassroots influence and funds.

¶2. (C) Ahadi described in some detail his own struggle to organize a national campaign. He acknowledged he is skating over a serious schism in his Pashtun nationalist Afghan Millat party, once his base of political organization. Karzai has co-opted Popal, the party's titular number two, Ahadi admitted, so Ahadi has decided to postpone questions of "party discipline" until after the election. His campaign office in Kabul is up and running and next Wednesday will host a conference for representatives of varied ethnic, political, and social groups, including religious, tribal, and jihadi leaders. He is working now to set up provincial offices despite a shortage of funds. These provincial offices will try to gain the support of local leaders, and Ahadi will concentrate instead on "policy." He will soon visit major cities, starting with Mazar, Herat, Jalalabad, and, if possible, Kandahar. Ahadi noted wryly that Afghan players often expect to sell their support to the highest bidder; he, in contrast, is seeking campaign contributions. "This is the most difficult thing I have ever done," Ahadi confessed. "I am more comfortable in the intellectual sphere."

¶3. (C) As for a platform, Ahadi stressed "Fifty percent of the country's problems are due to a lack of leadership. My main message is the need to change the leadership." He is supplementing this anti-Karzai strategy with an election manifesto, highlighting the issues of corruption and security. On security, he would like to see international forces do more. On corruption, he believes a few exemplary prosecutions, plus a few new technical controls, would serve to deter and curb future abuses.

¶4. (C) Ahadi agreed with the Charge's point that August 20 remains the best possible date for elections. In response to the Charge's statement on the US position on an interim government and the need for stability, Ahadi was willing to accept Karzai leadership between May and August, but still preferred Karzai step down. When the Charge raised the possibility of election safeguards, listing several Afghan

proposals, Ahadi agreed safeguards were needed and promised to respond in a few days with his own ideas.

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